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# Word and Spirit in the Confessions of the European Reformation

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## Word and Spirit in the Confessions of the European Reformation

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### **Abstract**

Protestant spirituality is characterized by the mutual relationship between Word and Spirit. The doctrinal formulations of this relationship in the confessions of the Reformation period show that this specific feature of Protestant spirituality originated from the opposition to Rome and the Radical Reformation. The objections by Protestants against the mediaeval view that grace was infused through the sacraments led them to emphasize that faith was worked by the Spirit, in the heart. On the other hand, their objections against spiritualizing tendencies in the Radical Reformation led them to emphasize that faith was a matter of trust, based on the external Word. This twosided tension led to a nuanced view of the relationship between the external Word of God and the internal work of the Spirit. In Lutheran and Reformed theologies this led to different spiritualities. The author traces these developments by analysing several Protestant confessions of the Reformation period.

### **Keywords**

spirituality – Word and Spirit – confessions – Lutheran – Reformed

### **1 Spirituality in the Confessions**

The confessional statements from the Reformation period summarize the theological views in tense formulations. Mostly originating from a polemical context, they express what were seen as universal truths.<sup>1</sup> This makes them

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mark A. Noll, *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 14–21.

important sources for studying the development of Protestant theologies. But are they also useful for the study of spirituality? These confessions do not offer much insight into the details of worship, prayer, and practical Christian life. From a traditional Christian definition of spirituality, as pertaining to the spiritual life and individual sanctification, the confessions do not seem to be obvious sources. But spirituality can also be taken in a broader sense: as human ways of relating to the divine. In that view, these confessions are relevant sources – although they hardly discuss the expressions of that relationship in everyday life – because they focus on theological decisions that are vital for the proper understanding of these expressions.

Christian spirituality can be defined as the various ways in which “individuals and communities appropriate traditional Christian beliefs about God, the human person, creation, and their interrelationship, and then express these in worship, fundamental values and life-style.”<sup>2</sup> The fact that this appropriation mostly occurs within a community makes confessional statements all the more relevant.

Essential for properly understanding the spirituality of early Protestants is their view of the relationship between Word and Spirit. Whereas the traditional Catholic view tied the work of the Spirit to the sacraments, and some representatives of the Radical Reformation viewed the work of the Spirit as independent of all externals, representatives of the magisterial Reformation held the opinion that the Spirit works through the Bible as the Word of God.<sup>3</sup>

The Reformers denied that the church had ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice, and instead referred to Scripture. This appeal to *sola Scriptura* forced them to explain on which grounds the authority of Scripture rested, if it did not depend on the church.<sup>4</sup> John Calvin developed the doctrine

2 Philip Sheldrake, “Spirituality as an Academic Discipline,” in *Spirituality and the Curriculum*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (London: Cassell, 1999), 55–78, 57.

3 The term “magisterial Reformation” refers to evangelical reform supported by magistrates and to the connection with academic teaching (*magister*). The different movements which dissented from the magisterial Reformers, such as Anabaptists and Spiritualists have been called the Radical Reformation since the study of George H. Williams titled *The Radical Reformation*. See Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 11.

4 John Calvin, for instance, says that the authority of Scripture does not depend on the decisions of the church and that we believe that Scripture is from God through the testimony and illumination of the Spirit. See book 1.5.1–2, 1.7.4–5 in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, transl. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (London: scm Press, 1961), 74–76, 79–81.

of the internal testimony of the Spirit (*testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*) as the ultimate source of certainty for the divine origin and truth of the Bible. The Bible is to be believed because it is the Word of God, but the question of how one can know that the Bible is the Word of God is answered with a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells in the heart of the believer and testifies to the authenticity of the Word.

This solution to the problem of authority, however, brought him close to some representatives of the Radical Reformation, who sharply distinguished between the Spirit and the letter of the Word and, preferring the former, stressed the inner illumination of the soul. Reformed theologians replied that while the self-convincing character of Scripture was only really discerned through the testimony of the Spirit, its authority was reflected in external marks and proofs.<sup>5</sup> This solution indicates a tension between the appeal to Scripture as the external source of authority and the appeal to the Spirit for the internal acceptance of that authority.

This theological issue is reflected in the variant understandings of the relationship between Word and Spirit in the appropriation of Christian faith.<sup>6</sup> In order to trace the continuities and discontinuities of this aspect of Protestant spirituality in early modern Europe, this article first focuses on the debate of the magisterial Reformation with Catholicism and the Radical Reformation. The *Augsburg Confession* (1530), the main document of early Protestantism, will be compared with a few related confessions, such as the *Marburg Articles* (1529), the *Tetrapolitan Confession* (1530), and the *Schmalkald Articles* (1537). As we will see, there are hardly any differences between the Lutheran and Reformed views of the relationship between Word and Spirit in this early period. Next, a closer look will be taken at developments within the Reformed stream of the magisterial Reformation by analysing the *Second Helvetic Confession* (1562), the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), and the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675).

The aforementioned documents are only a small selection from a broad range of confessional writings. They have been chosen because of their impor-

5 Although the authority of Scripture only becomes clear to us through the work of the Spirit, the *testimonium* is no revelation of the Spirit next to Scripture itself, see J. Rohls, *Theologie reformierter Bekenntnisschriften: von Zürich bis Barmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1987), 46. For a discussion of this issue in John Calvin see Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 13–70.

6 For a discussion of the importance of word and spirit for the spirituality of the early reformation see Jill Raitt, ed., *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation* (London: scm Press, 1988), 268–299, 318–333.

tance and influence as accepted confessional writings of the respective churches and because they provide some reflections on the relationship between Word and Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Early Confessions between Catholicism and the Radical Reformation

The 1530 *Augsburg Confession*, written by Martin Luther's colleague Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), intended to prevent a further split of the church. In the fifth article, the “evangelical” (read: Protestant) churches of Germany declare that the *ministerium* of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments is instituted so that justifying faith may be obtained: “[T]hrough the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the gospel.”<sup>8</sup>

The background of this emphasis on the work of the Spirit is the rejection of semi-Pelagianism in late-mediaeval theology. The *Confessio Augustana* says that the human *voluntas* has no power without the Spirit to attain to the righteousness of God. True righteousness is worked in the heart when Christians receive the Spirit through the Word.<sup>9</sup> The work of the Spirit through the promise of the gospel excludes all human merit.

This position is fenced off from radical spiritualism. The evangelical churches “condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to men without the external word, through their own preparations and

7 These confessions are not suitable sources for answering the interesting question of how the Reformation relates to mediaeval spirituality. Martin Luther, for instance, in his *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* discriminates between the faithful's spiritual or inward nature and their bodily or outward nature. Luther may have derived this distinction from the German mediaeval mystics.

8 *Augsburg Confession*, [henceforth *ca*], 5; *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986), [henceforth *bslk*], 58. The translation relies on Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 31.

9 *ca*, 18, *bslk*, 73. Cf. Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 39. In the later editions of the *Augsburg Confession*, the *Variata*, Melanchthon modifies the sentence and says that we are “helped by the Holy Spirit, and receive the Spirit when we assent to the word,” Philipp Melanchthon, *Bekentnisse und kleine Lehrschriften*, vol. 6 in *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl: Studienausgabe*, ed. Robert Stupperich (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1951), 23.

works.”<sup>10</sup> It is not clear who the aforementioned “others” are, but probably the

reference is to radical spiritualist groups – other than the Anabaptists.<sup>11</sup> The confession has a double battlefield: the authors distance themselves both from Rome and from the Radical Reformation.

The idea that the work of the Spirit is inseparable from the external preaching of the word of God by an official ministry was common ground for all the early representatives of the magisterial Reformation. At the Marburg Colloquy, held in October 1529 – just before the Augsburg Diet – Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli did not settle their disagreement on Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper but they did reach an agreement on fourteen other issues.<sup>12</sup> The eighth point of agreement, titled “On the External Word” (*Von dem eusserlichen Wort*), stated that “the Holy Spirit, to express it clearly, gives no one this faith or his gift without preceding preaching or oral word or the gospel of Christ. But through and with such oral word he [the Spirit] works and he creates faith, where and in whom he pleases.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, the work of the Spirit is tied to preaching. As the tension between the Protestant and the Catholic positions increased, the representatives of the magisterial Reformation accused Catholic theology of holding the same position as the Radical Reformation. In their view, both parties referred to the work of the Spirit – either in the individual or in the church – over against the revealed Word of God. Martin Luther, for instance,

<sup>10</sup> *ca.* 5, *bslk.* 58. Cf. Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> The text of the *Augsburg Confession* leans on Martin Luther’s *Confession Regarding the Supper of Christ* (1528). One of his reasons for formulating this personal confession was the fear that the *Schwärmer* would misuse his writings, Martin Luther, *Vorlesung über I. Timotheus 1528; Schriften 1528*, vol. 26 in *Martin Luther’s Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlhaus, 1883) [henceforth *wa*], 499. Cf. Wilhelm Maurer, *Einleitung und Ordnungsfragen*, vol. 1 in *Historischer Kommentar zur Confessio Augustana* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1979), 33.

<sup>12</sup> On the Marburg Colloquy see Susi Hausamann, “Die Marburger Artikel – eine echte Konkordie?” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 77 (1966): 288–321. Some related texts are brought together in Gerhard May, ed., *Das Marburger Religionsgespräch 1529*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> “Zum Achten, das der heylig Geyst, ordennlich zureden, nymands sollichem glauben oder seine Gabe gibt on vorgend Predigt oder muntlich wort, oder Euangelion Christi. Sonndern durch und mit sollichem muntlichen Wort, wirckt er und schafft er den glauben, wo und jn wilchen er will, Rom. x.” See Wilhelm H. Neuser, “Die Marburger Artikel von 1529,” in *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften 1/1, 1523–1534*, eds. Heiner Faulenbach and Eberhard Busch (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002), 259–267, 264.

discusses “enthusiasm” in the 1537 *Schmalkald Articles*.<sup>14</sup> There he says that “God gives no one his Spirit or grace, except through or with the external word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts.”<sup>15</sup> By “enthusiasts” Luther means those who refer to the Spirit and explain the Scripture at their pleasure. As an example, he mentions Thomas Müntzer (1490–1525), the Protestant theologian who had become a rebel leader during the Peasant’s War, but he continues by saying that “the Papacy, too, is nothing but enthusiasm, for the Pope boasts that all laws are in the shrine of his heart, and he claims that whatever he decides and commands in his churches is spirit and law, even when it is above and contrary to the Scriptures or spoken Word.”<sup>16</sup> According to Luther, enthusiasm is an old trick of the devil, who seduced Adam and Eve to enthusiasm, luring them away from the external Word of God into spiritualizing self-conceit. Since this enthusiasm is inherited by Adam’s children, its poison is infused into them by the old dragon. It is the source and power of all heresies, including the Papacy and Islam. Apparently, Luther is of the opinion that the extremes of the Catholic, institutional position and the radical, anti-institutional position touch each other. Both inspired by a wrong spirit. In short, according to the early Lutheran confessions, the Spirit is only communicated through and with the administration of the Word and the sacraments.<sup>17</sup> The work of the Spirit is bound to the external Word of God.<sup>18</sup>

14 William R. Russell discusses the fight against Enthusiasm in his introduction to Luther’s theology from the perspective of the *Schmalkald Articles* in William R. Russell, *Luther’s Theological Testament: The Schmalkald Articles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 21–22.

15 *Schmalkald Articles*, [henceforth *sa*], 3.8.3; *bslk*, 453. Cf. Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 312.

16 *sa*, 3.8.4; *bslk*, 454. Cf. Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 312. John Calvin also identifies both positions in his *Reply to Jacobo Sadoletto* (1536), John Calvin, *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*, eds. P. Barth and G. Niesel (Munich: Kaiser, 1926–1936), 1, 465. Cf. J. Calvin and J. Sadoletto, *A Reformation debate: Sadoletto’s letter to the Genevans and Calvin’s reply*, ed. J.C. Olin (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 61.

17 Holsten Fagerberg, *Die Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften von 1529 bis 1537* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 27. Or as Gunther Wenz says, “Der Geist wirkt den Glauben durch Medien des Heils,” Gunther Wenz, *Theologie der Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche: eine historische und systematische Einführung in das Konkordienbuch*, vol. 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 584.

18 Luther, *wa* 6, 94. Cf. Oswald Bayer, “Gesetz und Evangelium,” in *Bekenntnis und Einheit der Kirche: Studien zum Konkordienbuch*, eds. Martin Brecht and Reinhard Schwarz (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1980), 155–173, 157. The work of the Spirit through the word in the heart is a more important issue than the inspiration of Scripture, although both cannot be disconnected, Edmund Schlink, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften*, vol. 8 in word and spirit in the confessions of the european reformation 101

The early confessions of the Reformed tradition also emphasize the external Word. On this issue there was no disagreement among the representatives of the magisterial Reformation. This is apparent from the *Tetrapolitan Confession* (also known as the *Strasbourg Confession*, or the *Swabian Confession*), which was drafted by Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito and signed by the four cities at the Augsburg Diet.<sup>19</sup> Designed as an alternative for the *Augsburg Confession*, it offers a different view on Christ's presence in the Eucharist, but not on the internal work of the Spirit. The article on the sacraments states that it has pleased the Lord to teach his church the external Word because the church lives in the flesh, though not according to the flesh.<sup>20</sup>

### 3 The Second Helvetic Confession

In the confessions of the second generation of Reformers, differences between the Reformed and Lutheran positions regarding Word and Spirit appear. A good example is the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, written by Heinrich Bullinger in 1562 and accepted as an official creed to express the Reformed faith for the Palatine under Frederick iii. He had it translated into German and published. It was adopted by the Reformed Churches in Switzerland and some other countries, for instance, Hungary. The first chapter is titled "Regarding Holy Scripture, the True word of God."<sup>21</sup> The canonical Scriptures are the true word of God, they have sufficient authority in themselves, and from them all true wisdom and godliness are to be derived. In the margins of the text, Bullinger wrote short

*Einführung in die evangelische Theologie*, ed. Edmund Schlink, 3rd ed. (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1948), 32.

<sup>19</sup> This confession of four imperial cities, Strasbourg, Constance, Memmingen, and Lindau presented the Swiss understanding of the Lord's Supper and attempted to mediate between the positions of Luther and Zwingli, Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 225.

<sup>20</sup> *Confessio Tetrapolitana*, 16; Ernst Friedrich Karl Müller, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche: In authentischen Texten mit geschichtlicher Einleitung und Register* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1903), [henceforth *brk*], 55–78, 71. Cf. Wilhelm H. Neuser, "Confessio Tetrapolitana von 1530," in *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften I/I*, eds. Heiner Faulenbach and Eberhard Busch (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002), 447–494. The confession also calls the Holy Spirit the internal teacher who guides the church, *Confessio Tetrapolitana*, 8; *brk*, 62. For an English translation cf. Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 51–88.

<sup>21</sup> *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* [henceforth *chp*] 1; *brk*, 170. For an English translation cf. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 224–302.



summaries of the paragraphs, as was the custom in many publications. One of these marginalia in the chapter on Scripture says: “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.”<sup>22</sup> Elaborating on the phrase, Bullinger underlines that one should not conclude from the dependence of true religion on internal spiritual illumination that external preaching is useless. The main reason for this warning lies in the opinion that the effect of the gospel depends on the holiness of the preacher, which was a common idea among Anabaptists and other representatives of the radical Reformation. Bullinger stresses that the Word itself must be taken into account, not the minister. Even if he is an evil sinner, the Word of God remains true and good. Here we see the same concern for making the effect of grace dependant on the person who administrates the means of grace, which originally occasioned the Catholic concept of the *ex opera operato* efficacy of the sacraments.<sup>23</sup>

No one can come to Christ unless drawn by the Father (John 6:44) and inwardly illuminated by the Spirit, Bullinger writes, yet it surely is the will of God that his Word be preached outwardly also. It is God’s good pleasure to use human instruments, as is shown by the story (in Acts 10) of Cornelius: a Roman centurion to whom an angel appeared, telling him to call the apostle Peter so that the latter could tell him what to do.<sup>24</sup> This divine detour underlines the importance of the external Word. Inward illumination apparently does not eliminate external preaching. The same God that illuminates the heart internally by the Spirit, writes Bullinger, has commanded the disciples to go into the whole world and preach the gospel.

The *Second Helvetic Confession* also refers to the case of Lydia in Philippi to whom Paul preached the word outwardly (*exterius*), while the Lord opened her heart inwardly (*interius*). Bullinger stresses the outward Word by pointing to

<sup>22</sup> *chp* 1; *brk*, 171. Cf. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 225. On the discussion with the Radical Reformers, who emphasized the work of the Spirit at the expense of the authority of the written and preached word, cf. E. Koch, *Die Theologie der Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 33.

<sup>23</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 183.

<sup>24</sup> The Reformers used the fact that Peter and not the angel preached to Cornelius as an argument for the importance of the *ministerium* of the gospel. Luther says that Cornelius could not have believed without first hearing the Word: *sa*, 3.8.8; *bslk*, 454. Cf. Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 313. John Calvin comments that anyone who wants to be illuminated by the heavenly light should attend to the external voice of preaching that Christ uses as an instrument and not look for revelations from heaven, John Calvin, *Commentary on Acts* 10:5; John Calvin, *Joannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, eds. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1863–1900) [henceforth *co*,] 48, 228.

the fact that the same apostle who preached in Philippi states in Romans 10 that faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God by the preaching of Christ.

Thus far this confession can be interpreted as a confirmation of the importance of the external Word over and against spiritualizing tendencies. In this respect, it seems to be in line with the earlier Lutheran confessions, but there is also an important difference. The *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* gives the work of the Spirit an independent place, as the closing remarks on inward illumination and external preaching demonstrate: “At the same time we recognize that God can illuminate whom and when he will, even without the external ministry, for that is in his power; but we speak of the usual way of instructing men, delivered unto us from God, both by commandment and examples.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, the external word is necessary for us, but not for God; he can work *sine externo ministerio* (without external ministry). The difference lies in the absolute necessity of the word that is maintained by the Lutheran and denied by the Reformed confessions.

It would be an oversimplification to say that according to the Lutherans the Spirit works *per verbum* and according to the Reformed *cum verbo*: both expressions are used on both sides. Yet, in comparison with the Reformed, the Lutherans put more emphasis on the necessity of the Word.<sup>26</sup> Their confessions maintain that the external Word is a necessary condition for the internal work of the Spirit, while the Reformed confessions say that the internal work of the Spirit is a necessary condition for the effect of the external Word.

The *Second Helvetic Confession* also warns of hypocrisy. “[T]here are many hypocrites, who outwardly (*foris*) hear the word of God, and publicly receive

25 chp 1; brk, 171. Cf. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 225. According to Koch, the central word pair for Bullinger in the discussion of the relationship between word and Spirit in the *Confessio Helvetica* is *foris* and *intus*. He interprets Bullinger’s position as strongly Zwinglian. See Koch, *Theologie der Confessio*, 36–40.

26 According to Herman Bavinck while “the Reformed usually say that the Holy Spirit unites with the word (*cum verbo*), the Lutherans prefer to express themselves by saying and increasingly emphasizing that the Holy Spirit works through the word (*per verbum*).” See Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, vol. 4 in *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. J. Vriend, ed. J. Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 457. Regin Prenter states that there is no dilemma between *per verbum* and *cum verbo* between Luther and Calvin, Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator; Studien zu Luthers Theologie*, vol. 6 in *Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus*, ed. C. Kaiser (München: Kaiser, 1954), 107–132. On the issue of *per verbum* versus *cum verbo* see Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, vol. 10 in *Studies in Dogmatics*, ed. Gerrit C. Berkouwer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 213–222.

the sacraments, [...] yet they are inwardly (*intus*) destitute of true illumination of the Spirit.”<sup>27</sup> Regarding the institution and duties of the *ministerium* it says that, although God uses ministers to gather and establish the church, he actually does not need them. The confession warns not to attribute conversion to the secret power of the Spirit in such a way that ecclesiastical ministry is despised, but continues: “Yet, on the other hand, we must beware that we do not attribute too much to ministers and the ministry [...] God teaches us by his word, outwardly (*foris*) through his ministers, and inwardly (*intus*) moves the hearts of his elect to faith by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>28</sup>

In the articles on the sacraments, the distinction between outward and inward shows up again. God himself has added the sacraments to the Word as mystical symbols, “whereby he seals his promises, and outwardly (*exterius*) represents, and, as it were, offers unto our sight those things which inwardly (*interius*) he performs for us.”<sup>29</sup> In the further explanation, the difference with the Lutheran view is formulated: “We do not approve of the doctrine of those who teach that grace and the things signified are so bound to and included in the signs that whoever participate outwardly (*exterius*) in the signs, no matter what sort of persons they be, also inwardly (*interius*) participate in the grace and things signified.”<sup>30</sup>

This does not mean that the value of the Word and the sacraments depends on the condition of the recipients any more than it depends on the worthiness or unworthiness of the administrators. The value of the sacraments depends upon the truthfulness and grace of God. The Word remains true, even if it is not believed and the sacraments remain true, even if unbelievers do not receive the things offered. From God’s perspective, the sacraments signify and offer the things signified, even if they are not received.

The relationship between *signa* and *res* was much disputed among Protestants with regard to the sacraments. The 1549 *Consensus Tigurinus* says that everything signified in the sacraments is accomplished by Christ, who truly baptizes inwardly (*intus*) and – in the Lord’s Supper – makes us partakers of

27 *chp* 17; *brk*, 199. Cf. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 267.

28 *chp* 18; *brk*, 200. Cf. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 268.

29 *chp* 19; *brk*, 205. Cf. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 277. In the article on baptism the *Belgic Confession* states that the blood of Christ washes us internally in the soul (*interne in anima*), by the Holy Spirit, just as the water washes away the dirt of the body, see *Belgic Confession*, 34; *brk*, 246.

30 *chp* 19; *brk*, 208. Cf. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 281. The terms *exterius* and *interius* are inserted in the early published editions; the manuscript only has *foris* for *exterius*, see *brk*, 208 n. 1.

himself and fulfils what the sacraments figure, using them as aids, the whole effect of which resides in his Spirit.<sup>31</sup> The Reformed maintained that *signa* and *res* belonged to each other from God's side, but denied that they were inseparable from the perspective of all recipients. Only by true faith, which is the internal work of the Spirit, is grace (the *res*) received together with the sacrament (the *signa*).

According to Lutherans, the Reformed position was a dangerous underestimation of the objective value of the sacraments. The 1592 *Saxon Visitation Articles*, a document appended to the Lutheran *Book of Concord* in Saxony, specified the major disagreements with Calvinism. "[T]he body and blood of Christ are received in the Supper, not only spiritually, which might be done out of the Supper; but by the mouth [...] not only by the worthy, but also by the unworthy."<sup>32</sup> It is a false doctrine of the Calvinists that the body of Christ is not received by the mouth, but by faith alone. Although this polemical document does not objectively reflect the Reformed view, it does show what misinterpretations the Reformed had evoked by emphasizing the internal work of the Spirit.

The different views of the relationship between the sign (*signa*) and the thing signified (*res*) in the doctrine of the sacraments ran parallel to the differences regarding the relationship between the Word and the Spirit. In the doctrine of the sacraments, the Lutherans maintained the unity of the grace of God, the thing signified, and the outward sign, while the Reformed maintained that the grace of God remained free and was not necessarily connected to the sign. In a similar way, the Lutherans stressed the unity of Word and Spirit, while the Reformed emphasized that the Spirit was not bound to the Word. The Reformed maintained against the Lutherans that the Spirit could work without the Word – though he usually worked *per verbum*. They denied that inward participation was automatically connected to the external hearing of the Word or the outward use of the sacraments. The different concepts of the relationship between the external Word and the internal work of the Spirit developed parallel to the distinct doctrines of the sacraments.

31 *Consensus Tigurinus* 14; *brk*, 161. On the background of the *Zürich Consensus* cf. Emidio Campi, *Consensus Tigurinus: Die Einigung zwischen Heinrich Bullinger und Johannes Calvin über das Abendmahl. Werden – Wertung – Bedeutung* (Zürich: tvz, 2009).

32 For both the Latin text and the English translation see Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), 1:182. Regarding baptism the Calvinists, according to the *Saxon Visitation Articles*, falsely teach that it is only an external (*externus*) washing of water signifying internal (*internus*) forgiveness of sins without conferring regeneration or grace, see Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:188.

For Lutheran spirituality, this implied a focus on the Word and on the administration of the sacraments while Reformed spirituality focused on the application of the Word to the heart and the fruits of the Spirit, in sanctification.

#### **4 Later Reformed Confessions**

In later Reformed confessions this emphasis on the internal work of the Spirit through or with the Word is connected to the Reformed doctrine of grace. The 1647 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, for instance, offers a detailed discussion of the work of the Spirit in the application of salvation. It has a separate chapter on effectual calling, immediately following the chapter on free will.

God effectually calls all those and only those whom He has elected “by his word and Spirit, out of that State of Sin and Death in which they are by Nature, to Grace and Salvation by Jesus Christ: enlightening their Minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the Things of God.”<sup>33</sup> This call depends utterly on the free grace of God; the one who is called is completely passive until he or she is renewed by the Holy Spirit and thus enabled to answer this call and embrace grace. The chosen phrasing apparently intends to avoid Pelagianism or Arminianism.

In all normal cases the effectual calling takes place by the external word, but the *Westminster Confession* does mention an important exception: elect infants who die early. Like all others who cannot be outwardly called by the ministry of the Word, they are nonetheless “regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth.”<sup>34</sup>

The Westminster Assembly (1643–1649) was dominated by Puritanism, a movement within the Church of England that not only aimed at “purifying” the church from Roman Catholic remnants, but also developed a view of theology as the doctrine of living righteously for God. Puritanism paid special attention to the work of the Holy Spirit. It distinguished the general work from the saving work of the Spirit. The general or common work of the Spirit consists in a general conviction regarding the truth without a true change of the heart. This theology is reflected in the *Westminster Confession* that speaks of “common operations of the Spirit.”

<sup>33</sup> *Westminster Confession* [henceforth *wc*] 10.1; *brk*, 565.

<sup>34</sup> *wc* 10.3; *brk*, 566.

According to the Confession, the sovereignty of God decides whether the external Word is necessary. Although the external call of the gospel is very important, it is insufficient without the internal or effectual call and from God's perspective even superfluous for salvation. In the paragraphs on the assurance of salvation, a very important issue in the Puritan tradition, it is asserted that those who believe in Jesus and love him in sincerity, can be sure that they are saved. This certainty or assurance of faith is "founded upon the Divine Truth of the Promises of Salvation, the inward Evidence of those Graces unto which these Promises are made, the Testimony of the Spirit of Adoption witnessing with our Spirits that we are the Children of God ..."<sup>35</sup> The promises of salvation are only part of the ground of certainty; they can only be trusted when it is clear by inward evidences that one is renewed by the Spirit.

The emphasis on the internal work of the Spirit also appears in the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675), a statement against the theology of Moise Amyraut (1596–1664), professor at Saumur, who taught that atonement was hypothetically universal. Regarding the call to salvation, the *Formula* says that it never was completely universal. In the Old Testament period it was restricted to Israel. In the New Testament period the preaching of the gospel and the external call were extended to all nations, but not made universal.<sup>36</sup> The external call of the gospel is earnest and sincere. It is clearly the will of God that those who are called come to him and he earnestly promises eternal life to all those who come to him by faith. Still, the external call is only effectual in the elect. They alone believe in the external call, which is universally offered, while the reprobates are hardened.<sup>37</sup> The *Formula* explains the mystery of predestination by determining that "the spiritual person by no means brings about the internal conceiving of faith by God along with the external word of God (*cum verbo Dei externo*), either spoken or written."<sup>38</sup> The reason given in the *Formula* is the utter inability of all those who are externally called to obey the call, "unless they are raised up out of spiritual death by that very power that God used to command the light to shine out of darkness."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *wc* 18.2; *brk*, 579.

<sup>36</sup> *Formula Consensus Helvetica* [henceforth *fch*] 18; *brk*, 867. For an English translation, see, "Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675)," trans. Martin I. Klauber, *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990): 103–123.

<sup>37</sup> *fch* 19; *brk*, 867.

<sup>38</sup> *fch* 19; *brk*, 867. The English translation has the "eternal purpose of God to produce faith" instead of the "internal conceiving (or conception) of faith by God." See "Formula Consensus," 117.

<sup>39</sup> *fch* 21 *brk*, 868. Cf. "Formula Consensus," 119.

Thus, the *per verbum* of early Protestantism and the possibility of the *sine verbo* as an exception in early Reformed theology develops into the *cum verbo* in which the Spirit works along with the external Word.

## 5 Conclusions

The view of the magisterial Reformation on the relationship between Word and Spirit originates, on the one hand, in the debates with Rome and, on the other hand, with the Radical Reformation. As the agreement of the Marburg Colloquy shows, the idea that the work of the Spirit is inseparable from the external and official administration of the Word was common to all the early representatives of the magisterial Reformation. Whereas the early emphasis on the internal work of the Spirit functioned as an antidote for mediaeval semi-Pelagianism, soon the spiritualization of Radical Reformers led to the confession that the Spirit always works through the Word.

From the very beginning the emphasis on the inner work of the Spirit was intended as an antidote against Pelagianism. The development of Reformed theology in the later confessional statements points to a growing emphasis on the work of the Spirit and even to a certain independence from the external Word. This development is due to the ongoing desire to safeguard the sovereignty of God and the doctrines of grace.

Lutheran and Reformed theologies largely agreed about the authority of Scripture, but disagreed about the relationship between Word and Spirit. For the Reformed, the work of the Spirit was a condition for the true effect of the Word, while the Word was not absolutely necessary. For the Lutherans, the external Word was a necessary condition for the inner work of the Spirit.

Lutheran theology stood farther away from the Radical Reformation because it maintained that the Spirit always works through the Word (*per verbum*) and absolutely denied the possibility of the Spirit to work without the Word (*sine verbo*). Although the Reformed maintained that the Spirit normally worked through or with the Word (*per verbum* or *cum verbo*), the Spirit could also do without it. This leads to different spiritualities: Lutheran spirituality focuses on the outward administration of Word and sacraments, Reformed spirituality on the inward work and the fruits of the Spirit.

How this relates to worship, prayer, and Christian life is a different subject. But if spirituality is taken in the broader sense of the human relationship to the divine, in Reformed spirituality, the search for the certainty of faith tends to look to the inside to find the effect of the work of the Spirit. The greatest danger there might be perpetual doubt. In Lutheran spirituality, the search

for certainty tends to focus on the promises outwardly given in the gospel. The danger there might be presumption. Both emphases can supplement and correct each other.

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